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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 005261

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ARP, NEA/NGA, IO/UNP, EUR/UBI  
GENEVA FOR STONECIPHER  
LONDON FOR GOLDRICH  
PARIS FOR OFRIEL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/04/2012

TAGS: PREL KDEM IZ KU

SUBJECT: (C) TALABANI PLEASED WITH KUWAITI RECEPTION

Classified By: (U) AMBASSADOR RICHARD H. JONES; REASON 1.5 (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Jalal Talabani, leader of the Iraqi Kurdish PUK, told Ambassador December 3 he had been well received by the GOK, which promised to engage with other Iraqi opposition groups as well, and to facilitate contacts with other Gulf states. Kuwait's National Assembly had proposed to host a small conference on the future of Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations, as early as next month. Talabani expressed assurances that the PUK was committed to a federal, democratic Iraq respectful of human rights, with much smaller armed forces. He said he had also had good meetings with the French government in Paris. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) At his request (conveyed via NEA/NGA), Jalal Talabani, the leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), called on the Ambassador December 3, accompanied by Adnan Mufti and Adel Murad. PolChief sat in as Notetaker.

¶3. (C) HIGH-LEVEL WELCOME: Talabani, who arrived at the Embassy with a substantial Kuwaiti security escort, noted that this was his second visit to Kuwait since the liberation in 1991. He was very pleased with the welcome he had received from the GOK, including a symbolic meeting with the Crown Prince/Prime Minister, whose debility precludes him from carrying out official duties in any substantive way. He had also met with the man who actually runs the country, First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Shaykh Sabah al-Ahmed, as well as with Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Shaykh Mohammed al-Khaled al-Sabah, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Shaykh Dr. Mohammed al-Sabah, Speaker of the National Assembly Jassem al-Khorafi, and Chairman of the Assembly's Foreign Relations Committee Mohammed al-Safer. A planned courtesy call on the Amir was scrapped at the last minute on the advice of the ruler's doctor.

¶4. (C) SUBSTANCE OF TALKS: Talabani told the Ambassador that Shaykh Sabah was keen to cooperate with the US to get rid of Saddam, and did not express any need for a UNSCR authorizing use of force. Shaykh Sabah promised to engage with other Iraqi opposition groups and facilitate contacts between the opposition and other Gulf states. The National Assembly's al-Safer had promised to attend the upcoming London conference of the Iraqi opposition, and Shaykh Sabah had promised to send an observer as well. (Talabani summarized the purposes of that conferences as follows: unite all Iraqi opposition groups' appeals to the population; discuss how to reshape Iraq as a democratic country after Saddam; establish a coordinating/steering committee.) The Kuwaiti National Assembly proposed to host a small conference on the future of Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations, perhaps as early as next month. If the event took place in January, Talabani said, he would plan to participate in person; if later, he would send Mufti and Murad.

¶5. (C) COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRACY: Talabani stressed to the Ambassador, as he said he had done to the Kuwaitis, his commitment to democratization of Iraq, preservation of national unity in a federal system, and respect for human rights. He said it was important to cultivate political ties across ethnic and religious lines in advance of regime change, in order to avoid problems afterwards. In this spirit, the PUK had decided to give 8 of its seats at the London Conference to Sunni Arabs. Even though the Kurds had suffered casualties equal to the total number of Kuwaiti citizens, they did not hate the Iraqi people, just the regime. Talabani agreed with the Ambassador that Iraq needs strong institutions and the rule of law, not a strong man. He thought a three-person presidential council should be part of the new political structure of the Iraqi state. Noting that there are already 4 million Iraqis outside the country, he made the point that national unity has already been broken; regime change will help restore it. In his view, Iraq needs no more than about 50,000 troops, i.e. about a tenth of the current level. A well-trained police force will be an early and essential need.

¶6. (C) DEALING WITH TURKEY: Talabani said he had assured the Turkish Government that "we don't want or need an independent Kurdish state," but a "better life and our

rights." He said the GOT had decided to talk to the Iraqi opposition. He described the new Turkish Cabinet as people he knew, who were committed to raising democracy to European standards, amending the Constitution to prohibit torture, promoting political and press freedoms, and giving the Kurds more space: recognizing their language, ending the 4-year curfew in Kurdish areas. As for ex-PM Ecevit, Talabani said he was a paid agent of Saddam and deserved his recent electoral come-uppance.

¶7. (C) MEETINGS WITH FRENCH: Noting that he had just come from Paris, Talabani said he had had "very good meetings" with French officials including the Interior Minister, MinState for Foreign Affairs, Speaker of the Senate, and ex-FM Vedrine. All had supported regime change and democracy in Iraq, expressing hatred of Saddam, he said. Vedrine had publicly proposed at an international conference that Saddam be replaced even if he gives up all WMD.

¶8. (C) ON TO WASHINGTON: After the London conference, Talabani said, he would go on to Washington with the other top Iraqi Kurdish leader, the KDP's Barzani. He praised US Ambassador to Egypt David Welch for his role in brokering the Washington Agreement, which he said was being implemented: "we are uniting our positions, and deportees have begun to return."

RJONES